

## **Alumni Pride: Nursing grad helps wounded in Haiti**

**by Amanda Munger - Friday, February 12, 2010**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/2494/alumni-pride-nursing-grad-helps-in-haiti/>

When the volunteers arrived at the medical site in Haiti, the nurses on duty left for a break. Most of them didn't come back.

"It was just so chaotic that nurses were getting burned out," said Emily Akright, a 2009 University of Wisconsin Oshkosh College of Nursing graduate.

Akright recently returned from a trip to Haiti, where she offered aid to victims of the Jan. 12, 7.0-magnitude earthquake that claimed more than 200,000 lives.

Traveling with a group of 19 other doctors, nurses, surgeons and medical students from across the United States, she said the new volunteers quickly grew close to one another.

"There's something so unifying about the people who are volunteering their time and have given up time at home to help with this massive chaos," Akright said.

With more than 200 patients and a huge lack of information, the volunteers found ways to make the operation more efficient throughout their week together.

"We figured out a way to document things, and we were hanging IV bags by lines that were strung across the tent," she said. "It was just incredible the creativity that people had to think of how we could do things unconventionally."

The group left on Jan. 26 and returned to the U.S. one week later. During that week, they helped hundreds of Haitians who lost their homes and were injured in the earthquake.

The group, organized by Hope International Ministries, worked from a site set up by the University of Miami and Medishare at the airport in Port-au-Prince. Four large tents housed adults, children, supplies and the volunteers. An X-ray machine was set up in the children's tent, and the adult tent contained an operating room sectioned off by a sheet.

Akright said about 75 patients stayed in each tent and that for one day, she was the nurse in charge.

"I saw a lot of things that, as a new grad, you just don't get to experience," she said.

Akright worked 12-hour shifts, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. in the adult tent, where she treated broken bones, amputations and infections. One of her most memorable experiences was when a man came in with a gunshot wound.

"He had been mistaken for a looter but was actually part of the security team," she said. "It was late at

night and they didn't know, so they shot him."

The man needed a catheter put in, an operation that would normally be done using technology the group didn't have. Akright and one of the doctors knelt next to him and performed the procedure in the middle of the tent.

"It was all makeshift. You did what you had to do," she said. "After we were done, the doctor goes, 'Huh, I never did one of those before.' And I was just floored."

This was not Akright's first experience travelling abroad. Although she now lives in Waupaca, she grew up in Morocco, where her parents served as civil aid workers. Her fluency in French helped her because French is an official language of Haiti.

"I was one of the few nurses who spoke French, so I was kind of the nursing translator," she said.

Akright brought supplies to Haiti, including tape, dressing, medical gloves and blood pressure cuffs — excess donations UW Oshkosh received to be passed along to those in need in Haiti.

"I was able to go there with a duffel bag full of supplies," Akright said. "I really couldn't have done it without those gifts."

Jeanne Haitt, the learning lab supervisor in the College of Nursing, said this trip was an excellent experience for a new graduate.

"It's great for her to get real-life experience while waiting to get a job," Haitt said. "It's rewarding to work with people who really need help and for her to provide any level of comfort possible."

While at UW Oshkosh, Akright was a Kennedy Nursing Fellow, one of the top seven students to be admitted to the college. She recently took her NClex tests and hopes to work in an ICU setting. She also is considering going back to school for her nursing practitioner's degree.

The people of Haiti made a lasting impression on Akright, and she hopes to go back.

"I'll remember the resilience of the people and how loving and gracious they were for the help," she said. "It is important for me to know that people aren't forgetting. This is going to be an ongoing process. People could probably take a year working in Haiti and still know there was more need after that."